

Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP)

Steering Committee Meeting

October 5, 2007, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Resources Agency Bldg., Room 1131

Draft Meeting Notes

Associated documents/handouts:

- Agenda
- Draft Meeting Notes 7/18/07
- Draft Meeting Notes 7/27/07
- Handout #1: Options Evaluation follow-up document. Major evaluation assumptions. (paper copy only)
- Handout #2: Options Evaluation follow-up document. Assessment of “close calls” in ranking the Options for covered fish species. (paper copy only)
- Handout #3: Options Evaluation follow-up document. Summary results assuming entrainment as most important stressor for delta smelt. (paper copy only)

Action Items and Key Decisions

- Consensus among members is to move forward with hybrid approach to a conservation strategy that includes an isolated facility and other elements.

Updates

- Delta Vision held a panel workshop on levees that some BDCP members attended

Meeting notes review

Approval from members for both 7/18 and 7/27 notes. All notes from August and September will be reviewed at 10/17 SC meeting.

Science status report

Kim Delfino and Tom Birmingham are serving as the primary Steering Committee (SC) liaisons for science advisors. A successful workshop was held in September, with good participation and questions from SC members.

Denise Reed (Lead Science Advisor) and Bruce DiGennaro (Science Facilitator) presented overview of science process and summary of workshop outcome, including preliminary draft findings, which will be more complete in the written report. Additional components may also be added to the report before final presentation to BDCP Steering Committee.

The September workshop included nine advisors with a range of scientific expertise. The composition of the group may be different in any future workshops that the Steering Committee may choose to convene. The advisors did not specifically discuss the Conservation Options that were analyzed in the recent CS Options Evaluation document. Workshop topics included:

- Conservation principles,

- Plan scope,
- Knowledge base for planning,
- Critical processes, and
- External factors.

Science advisors agreed on three fundamental conservation principles for the Delta, and on seven additional conservation principles. The fundamental principles include:

- The system can't be entirely reversed/restored to its previous state.
- Future states of the Delta ecosystem depend on both anticipated changes (e.g., climate change and sea-level rise) and unforeseen or rare events (e.g. new species invasions).
- The Delta is part of a larger river-estuarine system that is affected by rivers and tides. Biologically, it is influenced by forces and processes beyond its boundaries (e.g. Pacific Ocean processes).

The additional conservation principles include:

- There is significant spatial and temporal variability in the Delta, including disturbance and extreme events that are essential characteristics of ecosystem dynamics. Delta cannot be managed as a homogeneous system.
- Achieving desired ecosystem outcomes will require more than manipulation of the flow regime.
- Locally-evolved species have life history strategies for variable environmental conditions. Species have limited ability to adapt to rapid changes caused by human activities.
- Prevention of undesirable ecological responses is more effective than attempting to reverse undesirable responses after they have occurred.
- Predicting ecosystem responses, especially to changes in the configuration of the system, requires more than documenting status and trends. Process-based models are needed.
- Data sources, analyses, and modeling should be documented and transparent so they can be understood and repeated.
- Adaptive management is essential to successful conservation. Actions must be based on:
 - Clear, measurable objectives
 - Well-supported hypotheses about potential conservation contributions
 - Consideration that some system states may be irreversible

The report will also include a discussion of how historical information should help guide management, and recommendations on modeling approaches that would be appropriate (e.g., mechanistic, rather than correlative, models that would include status and trends, exchanges and interactions in the system).

The advisors suggest that additional, non-fish species be included in the BDCP. They further suggest that additional aquatic species be considered, although not for the purpose of regulatory coverage, in future analyses in order to more fully incorporate and understand ecosystem processes and functions.

The advisors suggest that environmental gradients are an important concept to consider in the planning process. They note specifically that habitat should be understood as series of niches along continua (e.g., salinity, tidal influence, degrees of inundation) rather than as discrete types.

The advisors discussed the current scientific knowledge base at the workshop; these considerations will be a key component of the report. Human intervention and boundary conditions in the Delta influence chemical, geomorphic, higher-trophic species, biological, physical processes.

Timeline for report production:

- Draft report to SC 10/31/07
- Comments due 11/11/07 from BDCP members
- Final report 11/16/07

Conservation Strategy Options Evaluation

Paul Cylinder and Pete Rawlings presented. Since the last SC meeting, BDCP members attended technical sessions with the consultants to better understand the process of evaluation, key assumptions made, modeling and analysis details, and whether changes to assumptions would change conclusions. The next step for the SC is strategic selection of a single option or hybrid option.

Handout #1. Key assumptions made in the evaluation.

1. Habitat restoration would be effective.
2. Selenium source control. Evaluation assumed that SWRCB regulations to be implemented by 2012 would minimize selenium outflow from San Joaquin River watershed.
3. Screening facility at Hood would eliminate entrainment for all but a very few Delta smelt.
4. Delta flows could be managed so reservoir operational requirements would be met.
5. Knowledge limitations about effect of toxics on species. Biological effects of toxics on species are not well understood so this stressor was not weighed heavily.

Handout #2. Detailed list of “close calls” in the scoring and ranking CS Options for fish species in the evaluation. Close calls in ranking Options were considered to be ties.

Handout #3. Importance of non-natural mortality as result of entrainment at the pumping facilities. In the evaluation it was ranked as a moderately important stressor. Handout #3 shows results of evaluation with entrainment as a highly-important stressor. The ranking of Options did not change as a result. The major affect the re-prioritizing had is on the magnitude of the benefits.

Discussion

Fisheries agencies have not yet submitted their written comments, but have not found fatal flaws in the Options Evaluation. Agencies generally agree with the relative values/benefits of the Options and prioritization of stressors, and note that any Option might work under optimal operations. Adaptive management will be key.

The NGO caucus will also submit written comments, and are skeptical about using the evaluation as the sole foundation on which to select an approach.

There was general consensus among members that a hybrid option should include an isolated facility along with elements that could be implemented prior to completion of the isolated facility. See also Action Items and Key Decisions.

In the next two weeks, the BDCP Management Team will explore concepts for the official process for selecting an option and suggest them to the full membership.

The BDCP Management Team will serve as the hub for caucus discussions on “framework” development process. The consultant team will propose an outline/table of contents for the framework document to be produced in the next few months.

Public comments

Justin Frederickson (California Farm Bureau Federation). BDCP is an iterative process. Policy questions were brought up in the evaluation but had technical basis. CFBF policy: providing sufficient water to farmers in southern parts of state, protecting in-Delta water quality, protecting water rights for northern California farmers, and having high quality reliable water in export area. The options in the evaluation do not work well for all of their interests concurrently. Some work well for fish and export water supply, but not for in-Delta or northern water supply. Others are not good for fish, but acceptable for in-Delta agriculture. They propose a solution that builds mitigation into an optimized hybrid Option, including direct mitigation with in-Delta turnouts. The solution would also include: 1) indirect mitigation for third-party impacts on Delta water quality; 2) South of Delta storage; 3) source control, and 4) water conservation and use efficiency measures. He noted that the media attention on the Delta is divisive and not helping, and suggests bringing the interests together to discuss mitigation options as soon as possible, possibly with help from a mediator.

Next meeting

Friday 10/19/07, same time and location.

Meeting attendees

By phone

Wayne Spencer (Science facilitator)

Representatives and presenters

Karen Scarborough (BDCP Chair, The Resources Agency)

Paul Cylinder (SAIC)

Walt Wadlow (SCVWD)

Tom Birmingham (Westlands)
John McCamman (DFG)
John Engbring (USFWS)
Gary Bobker (The Bay Institute)
Leo Winternitz (CBDA)
Greg Gartrell (CCWD)
Ann Hayden (Environmental Defense)
Greg Thomas (Natural Heritage Institute)
Richard Roos-Collins (American Rivers/NHI)
Jerry Johns (DWR)
Campbell Ingram (TNC)
Kim Delfino (Defenders of Wildlife)
Frank Michny (USBR)
Dale Myers (Zone 7)
Kenny Watkins (CFBF)
Ara Azhderian (SLDMWD)
Will Stelle (The Resources Agency)
Marc Ebbin (The Resources Agency/DWR)
Laura King Moon (State Water Contractors)
Tom Howard (SWRCB)
Denise Reed (Lead science advisor)
Bruce DiGennaro (Science facilitator)

Additional attendees

See sign-in sheets